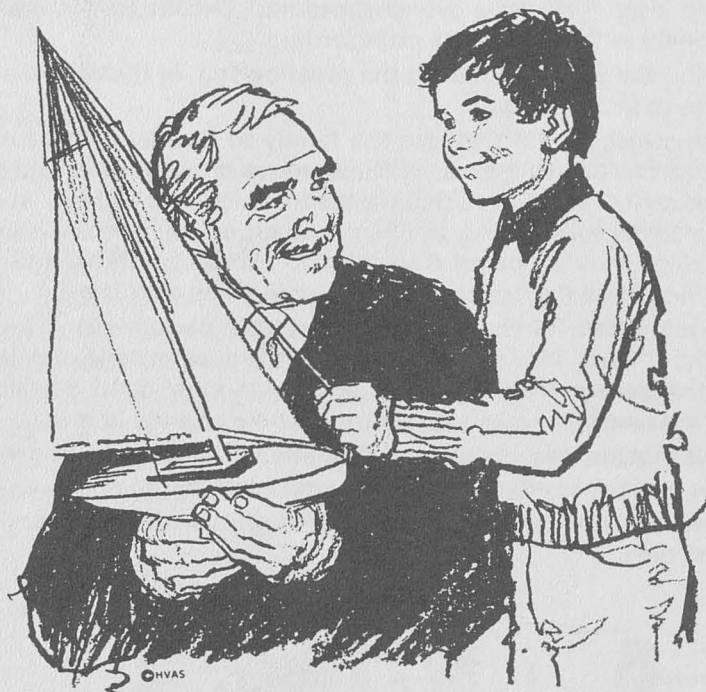


ABILITY -- not disability

With Acceptance

HARRIET E. MELDAHL, Area Extension Agent, Rehabilitation
with JOYCE WASCOE, Rehabilitation Assistant



True acceptance of a disability is difficult to achieve. With recognition of a disability as a part of life's circumstances and not thought of as a horrible fate, the handicapped person can function in a meaningful way again.

Many family problems are fostered because a person does not truly accept the disability. He tries to do too much, he feels sorry for himself, he takes it out on his family, or he becomes mentally unhealthy. Family difficulties can be faced more realistically if one feels comfortable with the disability.

A person experiences predictable moods or emotional stages when a major crisis such as a death or a major disability hits him.

The immediate reaction is denial. "No, this can't be true." This is the way the person wards off, at least for a time, bad news.

Secondly, anger is a very appropriate behavior for a frustrating experience. The anger can be directed at himself, people around him, or at the event that has occurred.

Bargaining is a very common reaction—trying to buy time or buy a less virulent form of the disability if he changes his life in some way. He is trying to alter fate.

Depression sets in next. It can last a long or a short time. This stage can be accompanied by physical problems such as aches and pains and inability to sleep. He feels overwhelmed and finds it hard to function. He feels lonely as though no one cares for him.

Finally, the person adjusts to the situation and, in the case of a handicap, comes to see hope again.

These stages are difficult for the family to handle. The depression stage may go on for a long time. A family member or a good friend should act as confidant and let the person express his feelings to him. It is best to be a good listener, letting the person work out his problems himself. The confidant should not get discouraged. He can bolster someone one day and find him in the depths of despair only a few days later.

It is important for the family to accept the person with a disability realistically. Treat him as a person of worth, responsible and lovable. Because the person fears rejection, encourage meaningful participation in family relationships as well as relationships outside the home.

Don't intrude into his personal life unless he volunteers information. Encourage him to express opinions, ideas, and feelings.

Allow him sufficient time to come to grips with his crisis. It may take a long time.

Family Problems

Even families without handicapped parents could benefit from techniques to forge better cooperation.

In one of the role play situations, the teenage son in the family was angry because the car which was promised to him was now needed for grocery shopping. A family council would help here. The children are allowed to help decide what must be done around the house, when they must be done, and who is going to do them. Once a program is set, members of the family should stick to it.

Parents often find as their children become teenagers, they rebel against the autocratic structure in the house. Again family counseling helps and a family council would solve some of the problems. Children have to feel they have a hand in deciding how the house should be run instead of just a hand in the work.

Ignoring the Disability

A person with a disability often pampers himself too much or pushes himself too hard. This often is found with a handicap like rheumatoid arthritis. It can be almost an invisible disease. The results of hard work usually show up the next day, not at the time. Mothers with this condition often let their families take advantage of them.

Many mothers see themselves in the traditional role of doing something for everyone in the house. When an illness forces them to give up some of this giving, they feel they are no longer adequate mothers. After many years of doing for their families, it is also difficult to get the families to do for themselves. But it is a necessity.

Displaced Parent

Another difficult situation occurs when a parent is disabled and can no longer fill his role. This can happen with a father who has been the bread winner and can no longer work. This takes a lot of adjustment on the part of all family members.

What makes it worse is the father's lack of acceptance of his illness. He feels he is no longer the father in the home. He withdraws into his shell. Alcoholism is frequently a problem.

Again here it takes time for the person to work through to an acceptance. Someone must take on the role of confidant and lead the whole family in treating the handicapped parent as a warm, loving, human being who has something to add to the family.



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



3 1951 D01 927 348 5

Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Roland H. Abraham, Director of Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108. We offer our programs and facilities to all people without regard to race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.